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ABSTRACT

This social report concerns the efforts of the German Youth Institute in working with other institutes and with other countries to develop youth policies and programs. It begins by describing German and Soviet youth researchers working together to develop a concept for a long-term youth policy based on democratic structures. The German approach to youth services and youth policy is briefly reviewed and policy changes needed to keep pace with the growing individualization of lifestyles are addressed. The German Youth Institute, with its eight departments of Youth Services, Youth and Work, Youth and Politics, Girls and Women Research, Family/Family Policy, Children and Child Care, Media and New Information Technologies, and Social Reporting and Documentation, is described as a mediator between field workers, researchers, and politicians. Lecture activities, publications, and research efforts of the institute are described and international cooperation between the German Youth Institute and a number of other countries in conducting research is discussed. The document concludes by noting that German assistance is being discussed in Latin America for the development of youth services and youth policies in Argentina and Chile and for projects with Costa Rica and Uruguay. (NB)

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S P E C I A L R E P O R T

YOUTH RESEARCH IN WEST AND EAST

- German Youth Institute offers benefit of its experience -

by Rita Maertens

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Introduction

Bonn (INP) -- Against the background of the increasingly acute political, economic and social problems experienced by the former Soviet Union in 1991, German and Soviet youth researchers were seeking to intensify the tentative contacts they formed in the past and together develop a concept for a long-term youth policy based on democratic structures.

At a lengthy conference staged recently in Bonn, researchers from the two countries discussed the subject of "Youth in the modern world: conditions for young people and youth research in the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR". Armed with two years' practical experience of addressing youth problems in Eastern Germany, the "German Youth Institute" has agreed to help the Moscow "Institute for Youth" tackle the tough assignment it faces in the years ahead.

Viewed alongside its counterparts in other European countries, the German Youth Institute has an ideal bank of records at its disposal as well as extensive and reliable practical experience and worldwide contacts. The tasks now looming into view from Eastern Europe are a new challenge for the Munich-based researchers.

New scope for East-West dialogue

As in other countries, youth work in Germany has changed radically in recent years because of the growing individualization of lifestyles. While youth workers in the past basically sought to keep young people "on the right track", gearing their support and advice to helping youngsters acquire specific qualifications, they now need to adopt a different approach to their preventive role in society. The counselling services they offer must take account of the need for every

individual to find the "slot" that suits his own personality in a diverse social landscape.

This opens up new ground for East-West cooperation - ground which is covered, for example, by the studies on "Youth and Nationality" and "Youth and Development" already agreed. A joint seminar programme looking at general youth problems - followed by a workshop for crafting individual concrete studies - is also being eyed for spring 1992. Until the question of funding for these projects is settled, individual researchers will make their own cooperative arrangements. René Bendit of the Munich institute has promised to work out guidelines to assimilate work methods and personnel and financial resources during this initial cooperation phase. The German side also feel it is important to learn more about the sociocultural background of the Moscow institute in order to maximize the efficiency of future cooperation.

Considering the German approach to youth services and youth policy - and the role played by the German Youth Institute itself - this attitude is understandable. Policy-making and practice in the welfare state are governed by the subsidiarity principle, which means that high-level action is taken only when front-line units report that a situation is beyond their control. The work of Germany's local and state youth welfare offices and the regional authorities above them is based on the Youth Welfare Act. These agencies work in close cooperation with private welfare institutions, pressure groups and the churches. The services rendered by these private organizations greatly outnumber and outweigh the welfare contribution made by local and state agencies. They receive grants from the state but the state does not dictate how the money should be spent. Within the public domain, local urban and rural district offices are also self-governing bodies.

All recognized youth welfare institutions can claim state support under specific economic, employment and educational programmes. There are also sociopedagogical support and cultural and political education programmes operating outside the sphere of the youth associations (under the federal youth plan). All these

measures enable initiatives and new ideas to be developed in direct response to actual problems and make it possible to steer financial assistance to where it is needed. Generally speaking, policy and practice is governed by the spirit of equal opportunity and integration, which means that personal initiative always takes precedence over official measures.

The government plays a subsidiary role within this clearly defined framework, taking advice from a youth affairs committee made up of researchers and representatives of private welfare institutions. The German Youth Institute is also represented. Youth problems are addressed by several university and private-sector institutes in the Federal Republic but the Munich institute leads the field in basic and practical research. It is not a state institution but a registered society, working under the supervision of a board of trustees. Its main sponsor, however, is the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth Affairs. Together with an independent committee of experts, it has to submit a national youth report to the federal parliament during each legislative period. It also produces a "Family Report" for the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs.

Most of the institute's work lies in basic and control research conducted with and for youth welfare organizations at all levels. Research commissions are far outweighed by studies and model projects proposed by the institute's own personnel. The German Youth Institute also strives to promote contact with other researchers and furnish practical support for educational endeavours, such as further training measures for social workers all over the world. Thanks mainly to the personal initiative of its staff, it has long maintained good contacts with research institutes and government agencies in Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Mediator between field workers, researchers and politicians

The German Youth Institute has eight departments: Youth Services, Youth and Work, Youth and Politics, Girls and Women Research, Family/Family Policy, Children and Child Care, Media and New

Information Technologies, and Social Reporting and Documentation. 80 of its 130 established staff in 1991 were researchers. The personnel roll extends far beyond those permanent positions, however, because the institute employs many researchers on term contracts for particular projects. At any one time, each department is working on three to seven projects of differing sizes. Since 1990, the departments have extended their project work to take account of the situation in the new federal states and Eastern Germany has also been treated as a separate project.

Reporting on the situation and prospects of young people in the former GDR, the "Youth Services" department raised the question of models and cooperation structures to provide vocational assistance for young people faced with high unemployment. The project "Youth services and social change" and the comparative study of the living conditions of rural and urban youth both encompass the new federal states - and now also look at migration aspects.

In 1990, schoolchildren in Western and Eastern Germany were polled for their views on democracy, the nation, reunification and the future. Now, concept work for the next youth report is being extended to cover the question of "national identity". Studies on extremism are also planned.

Looking at the former GDR has not added a new dimension to the work of the "Family/Family Policy" department, which has been working for years on a comparative study of family policy embracing the whole of Europe. Research trips to the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and the GDR have produced links with youth researchers throughout Eastern Europe and provided the data needed to complete the preliminary study "Family policy in flux".

The "Social Reporting" department looks at the changing face and development of family life.

Aside from stepping up practical assistance for the further training of social workers and building up youth welfare services in the new federal states, the German Youth Institute was commissioned to inspect the work of the Central Institute for

Youth Research in Leipzig. The Munich institute staff were impressed by the quality of the methodical work they found and the extent and management of the Leipzig institute's records. Initially, 30 of the 180 staff of the Leipzig institute were retained and, over the next three years, will be employed to complete ongoing long-term studies.

The German Youth Institute sees itself as a mediator between field workers, researchers and politicians. Many major projects receive support from Bonn and the reports on their findings are used as consultation documents by parliament, the Ministry for Youth and international bodies.

The extensive lecture activities of the institute's researchers and its numerous publications are welcomed by practitioners in the field of youth work. Collaboration in private groups, associations and committees guarantees a "balanced scientific approach". One thing that does not figure prominently among the German Youth Institute's operations, however, is direct involvement in further training for youth workers.

Many projects are conducted in conjunction with other research institutions, such as the German Research Society, Max Planck institutes, universities and private organizations in Germany and abroad. Many German Youth Institute staff teach at universities. Partnerships with universities abroad permit close cooperation. Interdisciplinary work is extremely important for practical ventures such as the creation of an "Information, Counselling and Further Training Service" for the youth welfare system in the new federal states.

For twenty years, the Institute has maintained bilateral and multilateral contacts all over the world, including Eastern Europe.

Scientific links in the field of basic research exist with the Netherlands, Great Britain and Spain. In Spain, the Munich Institute has been instrumental in helping to gear state youth services to youth research. A former employee of the German Youth Institute acts as consultant to the regional centres. Portugal,

a country with its own tradition of youth advice centres, has been able to extend its youth services with German help and further training.

In Latin America, German assistance is being discussed for the development of youth services and youth policies in Argentina and Chile and projects with Costa Rica and Uruguay.

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